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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 001178

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STATE FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/RSP, G/TIP, S/CT
USPACOM FOR HUSO

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SUBJECT: ASEAN: LOOKING AHEAD AS THE PHILIPPINES PREPARES
TO TAKE CHARGE

REF: MANILA 623

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., Paul W. Jones for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (SBU) Summary. The Philippines will assume the rotating
Chairmanship of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations
(ASEAN) in July 2006. The GRP plans to use its chairmanship
to focus ASEAN on maritime security and counterterrorism
issues, as well as regional anti-trafficking efforts,
alternative energy policies, and "socio-cultural" issues.
The Philippine leadership will seek to ensure that ASEAN is
open to dialogue on Burma. By the end of 2006, ASEAN may
adopt a formal charter in a bid to make the organization a
more significant regional political and economic power. The
Philippines will also host the East Asia Summit (EAS) in
December 2006, but, at present, the GRP goals for the EAS are
loose and undefined. End Summary.

VAP - Road Map for ASEAN Integration

12. (SBU) The Philippines will assume the rotating
Chairmanship of ASEAN in July 2006. According to Department
of Foreign Affairs Office of ASEAN Affairs Executive Director
Sylvia Marasigan, the GRP's primary objective would be to
continue the implementation of the 2004 ASEAN Summit's
Vientiane Action Program (VAP), which aims to promote
integration through security cooperation, economic
prosperity, and socio-cultural development. The GRP's major
emphasis would be on the socio-cultural development pillar --
which includes such issues as regional identity, protection
of citizens (especially women and children), the environment,
and public health -- where the Philippines has the lead role.

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Security: Maritime and Counterterrorism Issues
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13. (SBU) The GRP plans to use its chairmanship as well to
focus ASEAN on maritime security and counterterrorism issues.
Marasigan stated that before the end of the Philippines'
tenure, the GRP hoped to develop an ASEAN Maritime Security
agreement and to make maritime security a priority issue at
the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

¶4. (SBU) The ASEAN counterterrorism agenda under Philippine leadership would focus on strengthening joint counterterrorism commitments with ASEAN's ten Dialogue Partners, including Canada, the most recent addition. Marasigan added that, as the concurrent chair of the APEC Counter Terrorism Task Force and host to the 2006 ASEAN Regional Forum, the Philippines plans to host a multilateral counterterrorism conference in April (reftel). Marasigan observed that these activities presented an opportunity for synergy with the GRP's ASEAN chairmanship, allowing for significant advances in ASEAN and ASEAN Dialogue counterterrorism efforts.

Burma

¶5. (SBU) Marasigan noted that the Philippines has been sympathetic to U.S. and international concerns regarding Burma, and has attempted to use its membership in international and multilateral bodies to advance the cause democracy there. As Chair of ASEAN, the GRP would continue these efforts. While Burmese membership in ASEAN made the forum a difficult one in which to exert pressure, especially since decision-making in ASEAN is consensus-based, Marasigan stated the GRP will continue to be receptive to dialogue with the U.S. on Burma, both bilaterally and in its role as ASEAN chair, Marasigan said.

Energy and TIP

MANILA 00001178 002 OF 003

¶6. (SBU) According to Marasigan, combating trafficking in persons will remain a key component of ASEAN's socio-cultural development agenda. The Philippines will also push for ASEAN consensus and a plan of action on energy policy, focusing on the development of alternative energy sources. President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, who has made alternative energy development a top priority for the GRP, is personally behind this initiative.

ASEAN's Next Step: A Charter

¶7. (SBU) As ASEAN moves into the future, the GRP sees the establishment of a charter as an important next step for the organization. An Eminent Persons Group (EPG) on the ASEAN Charter has already begun work on the document (the Philippine representative to the EPG is former President Fidel Ramos), and a draft charter should be ready by December ¶2006. Citing the EU as a model, Marasigan said the GRP believes that a charter will help ASEAN become a more significant regional political and economic power, and provide an important counter-balance to the rising powers of China and India.

Beyond ASEAN: East Asia Summit

¶8. (C) The Philippines will also host the East Asia Summit in December 2006. On February 9, President Arroyo told Charge that the Philippines strongly supports deeper U.S. engagement in regional structures in Southeast Asia. Continuing high level U.S. engagement with Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is also essential, but President Arroyo said she wanted the U.S. to enhance its relationship with ASEAN in particular. Observing that the EAS had become a diverse collection of countries, President Arroyo suggested that the U.S. not neglect it either, since several countries in the region are very interested in it. She noted that the Philippines, as host, supports including Russia as a full EAS

member at President Putin's request. President Arroyo added that the U.S. role in Southeast Asia was being overshadowed by increased trade and investment from China, and, in the case of the Philippines, by tourism from South Korea. Her goal, however, was to deepen relations with the U.S. even as relationships grow with other countries so that the U.S. maintains its role in the Philippines and the region.

¶9. (SBU) At present, the GRP's goals of the EAS are still relatively loose and undefined. According to Maria Andrelita Austria, Special Assistant to the Undersecretary for Policy at the DFA, the EAS's most immediate goal is to bring ASEAN's other dialogue partners into the group. The loose structure and lack of policy-making apparatus in the EAS also make it a poor venue for the pursuit of concrete policy goals, Austria suggested. She cited democratic reform in Burma in particular as an issue the EAS would almost certainly not address.

Comment

¶10. (C) The Philippines can be expected to use its chairmanship of ASEAN to maintain focus on regional issues of great interest to the U.S., especially maritime security, counterterrorism, and democratic reforms in Burma. That's the good news. But the fact remains that ASEAN's consensus-driven decision-making style does not lend itself to quick, decisive, action. Nevertheless, the GRP remains rightly proud of brokering the 2002 Information Exchange and Establishment of Communications, a trilateral counterterrorism agreement signed by the Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia, and points to its success as a model for broader counterterrorism efforts ASEAN could undertake under Philippine leadership. As the GRP prepares for its starring role in ASEAN, the USG's goal should be to continue to press the GRP to move forward on a substantive agenda for ASEAN. The GRP would also view a decision by the USG to participate in the EAS as a national triumph and a tribute to

MANILA 00001178 003 OF 003

our unique bilateral partnership.

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Jones